

Worth of a Good Man

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/32094283) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/32094283>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	魔道祖师 - 墨香铜臭 Módào Zǔshī - Mòxiāng Tóngxiù
Relationship:	Lan Zhan Lan Wangji/Wei Ying Wei Wuxian
Characters:	Wei Ying Wei Wuxian , Lan Zhan Lan Wangji , Wen Ruohan , Wen Ning Wen Qionglin , Wen Qing (Modao Zushi), Wēn Xù , Nie Huaisang , Nie Mingjue , Jin Guangshan , Lan Qiren , Jiang Fengmian
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Everyone Lives/Nobody Dies , Alternate Universe , Not Jiang Sect Friendly , Not Jiāng Chéng Friendly , Not Beta Read , Tumblr Prompt , DO NOT COPY
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of Prompt Responses
Collections:	MDZS Kudos , favorite mdzs fics , The 🌟Fairest🌟 of Them All , Mo Dao Zu Shi , Not Jiang Cheng Friendly , Gave me an existential crisis , saviors of aeriois :> , Books Read - Completed (GMODC) , China Fandom , I don't wanna delete it but I've moved on from this so... eh , Wangxian faves , Seasoning , Insp
Stats:	Published: 2021-06-21 Words: 6,600 Chapters: 1/1

Worth of a Good Man

by [Vrishchika](#)

Summary

When you shine as brightly as a star, people notice. Everyone wants a worthy, loyal, and strong person by their side.

Notes

Prompt by Orsuliya - Not sure if you're still taking prompts, but if you were ever in the mood... See, I have always had a problem with WWX's position and treatment in Yunmeng Jiang. His status is terribly uncertain. Is he a servant? An inner disciple? An outer disciple? Nobody knows! He has no money except what he gets in allowance from JFM, gets punished according to non-existent rules, goes from brother to pet to servant in five seconds flat... It's confusing. He's Head Disciple, a hell of a powerful one and we can be sure that he earned that title since Yu-furen would (and probably did) scream favouritism. Now, my prompt is this: What if other sects start paying attention at some point and conclude that WWX would make an excellent disciple for almost any sect? And surely, if Yunmeng Jiang doesn't treat him all that well, he must be gettable! Cue the bidding war with various sects offering WWX favourable, clear-cut contracts and/or bribes. (Marrying him in is an option as well!)

Notes - This exists in a golden world where there's no sunshot campaign, Wens are moderately good people, and WWX is just that charming. Wangxian is almost completely absent until the very end.

Also, I was giggling as I was writing this fic. It is pure self-indulgent fluff. I hope you like it, Orsuliya! Idk if this was exactly what you wanted but maybe you'll have as much fun as I did? It's a fic for people who love WWX.

Fair warning: Not Jiang Friendly and the POV is all over the place.

See the end of the work for [more notes](#)

There's gossip at first, *of course*, there is. The son of Cangse Sanren, who famously spurned Jiang Fengmian's love to elope with a servant, is adopted into the Jiang Sect. The situation is rather baffling to most.

Other Sect Leaders and elders shake their heads. Ladies murmur behind closed doors and over tea, expressing sympathy and well-disguised glee at Yu-furen's circumstances.

When Wei Wuxian, not Jiang Wanyin, is made Head Disciple, the gossip takes on an edge. Words like '*bastard*' and '*unseemly*' get thrown around. Because why else would Jiang Fengmian elevate a servant's son above his own child?

Among the serene mountains of Gusu, an elder shakes his head and purses his lips in disapproval.

Rumors of Yu-furen's displeasure make rounds. Everyone sympathises with her and no one wishes to be in her place.

Then the child attends his first intersect event at fourteen.

People expect a lot of things. They expect a servant's son to falter, to prove unworthy.

They *do not* expect a charming little boy with a loud laugh, bright smile, and eyes that shine with brilliance.

He has only been a part of the Jiang Sect for four years but he's the best swordsman in their style among the disciples. He moves like he's water, weaving in and out of his opponent's guard, always with a playful smile on his face.

No one can beat him when he draws a bow. Barely fourteen years old and he can still handle the full draw weight of the weapon, hitting targets dead center.

The sects are... reluctantly charmed. Few people can resist the combination of a lively personality and a brilliant mind. Leaders nod in approval, hiding their envy, while ladies smile at the grinning child and gossip about Yu-furen's blatant disapproval.

Wei Wuxian gains somewhat of a reputation as the years pass. Some rumors say he's entirely intractable. His playfulness can turn into malicious mischief. He is lazy, irreverent, and often infringes on the generosity of others.

Those rumors circulate, emerging primarily from the Jin Sect, particularly from Madam Jin's accounts.

But when sect disciples and leaders meet him during nighthunts, he proves to be a different creature. He leads with casual, dismissive ease. Jiang disciples follow him around like ducklings, attentive, eager to please, and obviously enamored.

Wei Wuxian is impressively competent and no one can deny that when they see him in action.

Naturally, the other Sects start to notice the dichotomy soon enough.

Lan Qiren

Lan Qiren knows himself to be rigid and firm in his principles. When Wei Wuxian arrives for the summer lectures at Cloud Recesses, he is already prepared for chaos.

The Head Disciple proves him right on the very first day, sneaking in alcohol and troubling his beloved nephew with his mischief.

Nothing changes his mind in the following days. Jiang Wanyin is a steady, good child, far worthier of the Head Disciple position than Cangse Sanren's chaotic boy.

But-

But, Lan Qiren is an educator above everything else. He has taught hundreds of children by this point and he can tell the difference between malicious mischief and true playfulness.

After all, Lan children aren't perfect little soulless dolls. They have different personalities, interests, and faults as well.

He sees how the child fidgets in class, how he is distracted and bored. Wei Wuxian invents ways to keep himself entertained because nothing holds his attention for long.

He expects the boy to perform poorly in tests.

He doesn't expect pages upon pages of perfect answers, insightful opinions, unconventional but valid observations. Wangji's answers are textbook perfect. Jiang Wanyin's showcase a good mind and solid understanding of the subject.

Wei Wuxian's hint at a *brilliant* mind. Keen, inquisitive, hungry to know more and delve deeper.

Lan Qiren doesn't like disorderly students. He dislikes Wei Wuxian in particular. But he's an educator at heart. It is... *difficult* to restrain himself when the child playfully recites classical poetry from memory in a lilting cadence.

His speech is fluid and versatile. When provoked, Wei Wuxian climbs to the highest level of formality with a mocking light in his eyes. When at ease, he speaks with unsuitable but appealing informality. He has all the markings of a well-educated, diligent Sect Heir, which make the rumors about his rather dubious reputation all the more concerning.

This isn't an ignorant or lazy child. No student can recite poetry and prose, quote the Analects of Confucius, and sneak in a few phrases from Buddhist scriptures in the most casual settings if they don't have a true hunger for knowledge. And to do so with such dramatic flair, like he understands the depth and intensity of every word is even more impressive.

Lan Qiren is no fool. There are some inconsistencies in the child's behavior that can't be excused as mischief and unruliness. The flagrant disregard for rules stems from something deeper than mere disrespect.

It takes him nearly three months to understand the underlying cause.

Wei Wuxian always expects to be punished, whether he is culpable or not. He truly believes that rules are just a smokescreen that allow elders to abuse disciples without losing face.

Lan Qiren doesn't like Wei Wuxian. He's frivolous, irreverent, and a bad influence on others. He still punishes the boy for every wrong doing and enforces the rules strictly.

But when the child grins at him and slips in some four-character idioms from the Classic of Poetry, his educator's heart is charmed into submission. When he sees thoughtful, carefully worded answers to the tough questions on the answer sheets, his lips threaten to smile. When he sees traces of a scholar under all of that martial skill, he can't help but feel a kinship.

Lan Qiren doesn't show it, of course, but he is sorry to see the boy leave. Even if he *does* deserve the punishment for engaging in physical violence against a Sect Heir.

He's already planning ways to get Wei Wuxian back into Cloud Recesses at a later date. Surely, Jiang Fengmian will agree that Wei Wuxian needs the discipline and restraint of the Lan Sect to reach his full potential. Yu-furen, at the very least, will be happy to be rid of him.

And the child will be happy to be rid of *her*, Lan Qiren is certain.

He will not see that potential squandered under Jiang Fengmian's careless hand and Yu-furen's unrestrained temper.

"I will see you soon." He says, ignoring the speculative look from his eldest nephew and the surprise in Wei Wuxian's eyes. After all, teenagers can be reckless and volatile. Wei Wuxian as a grown man would be worthy of admiration.

Lan Qiren is determined to be a part of that growth.

Wei Wuxian finds himself back in Cloud Recesses barely a year later. He is sharper, wiser, more powerful, but he's still the soft poetry-sprouting jokester that lightens the air of any room he walks into.

Lan Qiren is outwardly displeased and inwardly content as he nudges the boy sternly towards texts on musical cultivation.

Later, when he hears stories of the Jiang Head Disciple subduing powerful fierce ghosts with piercing, enchanting melodies, he hides his smile behind his tea.

Good.

Wen Ruohan has heard of Wei Wuxian, of course. Sects gossip like children, disregarding their mask of grace and dignity behind closed doors.

He ignores the child at first. The boy is a servant's son and won't amount to much. Wen Ruohan is more concerned about his sons and their substandard performance in intersect events.

Then a Wen-led nighthunt stumbles across the *Xuanwu of Slaughter*. a-Chao flees with the other Wen disciples, somehow convincing the honorable Wen Zhuliu to follow as well. He leaves other sect disciples behind in a risky situation. Important children entrusted to the Wens by their sects are trapped in a cave with a monster because of Wen Chao's incompetence.

Wen Ruohan has yet to come up with a punishment painful enough to make up for such disgraceful behaviour. The son of the strongest Cultivator in existence, a mere feckless coward!

a-Chao even had the audacity to see some other sect's disciple as bait to distract the monster. His haste to flee destroyed the only escape route.

After making so many mistakes, a-Chao compounded his error by concealing the incident. The other disciples had to escape on their own.

It had been Wei Wuxian, Lan Wangji, and Jiang Wanyin's combined initiative that saved them all. Jiang Wanyin managed to find a way out from under the water and guide all other disciples through it. Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian distracted the monster, trapping themselves inside in the process.

By the time help reached them, the boys had managed to slay the *Xuanwu of Slaughter*, of all things.

Barely seventeen and the boys had managed to defeat an ancient beast seething with resentful energy. Wen Ruohan inspects the scene himself after the incident. The towering beast still radiates enough resentful energy to make his hair stand on end.

Wen Ruohan is admittedly intrigued. Lan Wangji credits Wei Wuxian and Wei Wuxian credits Lan Wangji for the feat. Honorable behavior, as expected from disciples of their caliber. He trusts the Lan's full report more than Wei Wuxian's short and succinct piece. It is natural for a servant's son to downplay his accomplishments to avoid overshadowing the sect heir.

Unlike his useless son; who claims to have played a part in it like he hadn't fled from the scene like a coward. Wen Ruohan feels a sneer cross his lips and promises himself to punish a-Chao severely for such a humiliation.

If only he had a son like Wei Wuxian to call his own.

He pauses at that thought and decides it is something to consider. What better way to reward that child for his bravery than to welcome him as a son of the greatest Cultivation Sect to exist?

Well, he'll first have to see if the boy is really as worthy as the rumors say he is. He can't make a weak, useless boy a part of his clan, after all. They already have to suffer a-Chao.

An opportunity presents itself when a group of Jiang disciples visit Yiling for a nighthunt. Wen Ruohan sends a-Xu to fetch them after the hunt is complete, inviting them for some food and rest. It isn't uncommon and the relationship between sects is cordial enough for the Jiangs to come willingly.

As expected, they don't have the audacity to deny him. The hunt is led by Jiang Wanyin and the boy proves to be nothing remarkable. Just another sect heir trying to keep his chin high when faced with someone much superior. Wen Ruohan lets the boy interact stiffly with his sons, watching the conversation with some amusement.

a-Xu doesn't seem very impressed but it is rare for his son to find any junior impressive. He is just as curious about Wei Wuxian as Wen Ruohan, which is probably why he takes pains to keep the Jiang heir entertained. The boy is stiff and hides insecurity behind a brittle mask of diplomacy. He clearly has a temper that he struggles to control and pride that is far too sensitive for someone of his position.

How boring. He is like a-Chao, just slightly more refined and maybe a smidgen more courageous.

Wen Rouhan waits impatiently.

As predicted, Wei Wuxian is sent after the group in a couple of days.

Tall, fair, and charming, everything about the Wei child is exceptional. He walks up to Wen Ruohan with an easy grace. He bows, greets, and smiles like he's not standing in the presence of the most powerful man in Cultivation Society.

Wen Ruohan is decidedly amused.

"When I heard my shidi were enjoying the Wen sect's stellar hospitality, I couldn't resist coming. I hope Wen-zongzhu pardons my intrusion." Wei Wuxian proclaims with a wide smile and cunning eyes. The Jiang heir looks displeased, sending silent warnings to his shixiong with his glares.

Of course, he knows better. Jiang Fengmian doesn't trust his heir. Why else would he give the Head Disciple position to Wei Wuxian?

"We were a person short," Wen Ruohan replies, delighting in the immediate light of understanding in the boy's eyes, "And now our party is complete."

"I see," Wei Wuxian bows with a flourish, "then this one must apologize for his tardiness. I didn't intend to keep Wen-zongzhu waiting."

How utterly charming. If this boy's mother was anything like him, Wen Ruohan understands why Jiang Fengmian still pines after her. He doesn't believe the rumors about Wei Wuxian being the Jiang-zongzhu's bastard. The man would've capitalized on the potential and made the boy his true son, despite his wife's displeasure. What better way to enrich a bloodline than by bringing powerful cultivators into it?

Either Jiang Fengmian is incredibly shortsighted or deathly afraid of his vicious wife.

After all, the Jiang Sect doesn't seem inclined to offer him a concrete position.

What *is* his position? Wen Ruohan has never seen a Head Disciple so poorly treated, though most Head Disciples are either Sect Heirs or bosom friends. The other Jiang disciples seem to follow him around with almost unseemly adoration, none of which is directed towards the Sect Heir.

Jiang Wanyin doesn't show any deference to Wei Wuxian, who is rightfully his senior disciple. In fact, he seems to go out of his way to reprimand and restrain the boy, creating a situation where there's no clear leadership. The shidi must naturally obey their da-shixiong on all matters relating to the nighthunt. But they apparently can't disobey the Sect Heir either.

Wen Ruohan doesn't understand how this plays out during nighthunts. What if Wei Wuxian's instructions contradict Jiang Wanyin's? Do the disciples disregard Wei Wuxian's natural superiority to appease the more politically powerful member of their sect?

Jiang Fengmian is a fool. He can already see the Jiang Heir struggle under such a dynamic. His role as a future Sect Leader clashes with his current role as er-shidi. How is the boy to learn *anything* under such a worthy disciple if he is plagued by insecurity?

Nevertheless, Wen Ruohan is keen to take advantage. a-Xu is a good boy but a-Chao is unfortunately weak and cowardly. If he brings Wei Wuxian into the family, he'll have powerful grandchildren through at least two out of three sons. Now that he thinks about it, Wen Qing would make a fair match for the brilliant boy.

His niece is just as intelligent and already showing signs of being a worthy woman. He can't think of anyone more suitable for her than Wei Wuxian.

It is decided.

a-Xu is the son after his own heart. Cunning and perceptive, he understands his father's intentions and seeks to please him like all good children do. Wen Ruohan observes their interactions and is pleased to see them so friendly. Wen Qing and Wen Ning seem to like Wei Wuxian too, although his niece seems to guess at his intentions and keeps her interactions with the Jiang Head Disciple pointedly platonic.

Wei Wuxian is honorable and mischievous but there's a streak of ruthlessness in him that matches a-Xu's perfectly. It doesn't take them long to strike up a lively conversation and make plans to spar. They compete ruthlessly for the entire week of Wei Wuxian's stay, evenly matched in all ways.

He is gentle with Wen Ning and Wen Ruohan sees his nephew flourish under the enthusiastic guidance. Wei Wuxian's experience shows in how he coerces Wen Ning out of his shell and pushes him to reach his full potential.

Wen Ruohan is also pleased to see Wei Wuxian pick up some of a-Xu's tricks and refine his already polished swordsmanship. Wen Qing introduces him to medicine and he is eager to engage in debates with her.

Seeing all of them sparring, debating, and mocking each other warms his heart. It is a good sign of things to come. When it is time for the Jiangs to leave, Wen Ruohan encourages his son to keep in touch.

After all, a-Xu would make a much better brother than the jealous little boy who follows Wei Wuxian around and keeps trying to restrain him. *Wei Wuxian* isn't the one embarrassing his clan.

Nie Mingjue

--

Nie Mingjue doesn't pay attention to gossip. He knows of Wei Wuxian from Xichen's amused comments about his brother's teenage crush and Huaisang's laments about missing him. But beyond that, he doesn't pay much attention.

Then the Xuanwu of Slaughter incident happens and he takes notice. Two boys, not yet adults, manage to defeat a monster that has existed for centuries. Nie Mingjue gets a detailed report about the incident from Xichen and grows increasingly impressed. Wangji has grown considerably from the little boy that silently stood behind Xichen, shy but unable to express it.

Wei Wuxian is a credit to his sect. He is bold, courageous, skilled, and reckless in ways that Nie Mingjue can appreciate.

"Wei-xiong?" Huaisang asks when Nie Mingjue enquires about him, "I like him very much, da-ge."

Mingjue huffs, "Yes, I know, but what is he like? His character, battle prowess?"

Huaisang arches a brow and shrugs, swinging his fan lazily, "I know he sparred Lan Wangji many times, usually to a standstill. I got the impression that it was just playful fighting, that he didn't fight seriously enough to defeat Lan Wangji."

"But he could." Nie Mingjue understands what is implied. His brother just shrugs again and hides his smile behind his fan, "*Huaisang*."

Nie Huaisang chuckles, "It's hard to tell with those two. Wangji-xiong is honestly bewildered and mesmerized by Wei-xiong. He just doesn't know how to act when Wei-xiong pays any

sort of attention to him. Wei-xiong likes to tease and poke at Wangji-xiong but has yet to realize why. They're entertaining to watch."

Nie Mingjue sighs and rubs the bridge of his nose, "Huaisang, I'm not interested in their *personal* affairs."

Huaisang sighs and leans back in his seat, his posture disgracefully lazy. Mingjue twitches but doesn't make things more difficult for himself by commenting on it. "I'd say they'll both be the most powerful cultivators of our time eventually. Wangji-xiong has a lot of discipline and strength. Wei-xiong doesn't just have a thriving Golden Core, but also a keen intellect. He's the smartest in our generation. If it weren't for-" He pauses and changes what he was about to say, "He is impressive."

Mingjue narrows his eyes, "If it wasn't for?" He presses because he doesn't entirely like the flash of distaste and hint of worry in his brother's eyes.

There's a moment of silence as his brother studies him, visibly hesitant before he nods to himself. "I have my concerns about the situation in the Jiang household."

Nie Mingjue arches a brow, "Situation?"

Huaisang hides a frown behind his fan and Mingjue sits up. It is rare for his brother to be so visibly careful with his words. "Nothing too serious, one would even say he is treated adequately enough for his station in life." Huaisang pauses again and Mingjue feels frustration rise in his chest. This *boy*, why must he test his patience like this?

His brother must read his expression because he continues hastily, "I just feel like they aren't straightforward with him. One moment he's the brother and nephew and the next moment the distinction of rank is enforced sharply, making it clear he isn't family." Mingjue doesn't have to think for long to understand what Huaisang means and feels a curl of distaste in his stomach.

If you can't commit to something with your whole heart, it is unwise to do it. They don't discuss it further but the conversation lingers at the back of his mind.

He sees evidence of it when they meet at a nighthunt. The Wei boy is sharp and quick and the Jiang Heir is impressive with his sword but there's an odd dynamic at play.

But nothing illustrates their respective characters better when Wei Wuxian injures himself to protect one of the younger disciples, stepping squarely between a yao and the boy. Instead of applauding such behavior as any sect leader would do, the Jiang heir reprimands Wei Wuxian for playing a *hero* and trying to *show off*.

"Well done, Wei-gongzi," He cuts in as he walks up to the boys, the Jiang boy flushes like he *knows* he has given into his jealousy and has the grace to bow out of the conversation. "I see stories of your capabilities haven't been exaggerated."

The boy grins, holding himself straight like a deep scratch on his chest is nothing but a small cut, "Nie-zongzhu flatters me," He chimes and Mingjue sees the charm that Xichen spoke of

with an amused smile. The charm that seemed to fluster the steady Lan Wangji, “I managed to injure myself on a simple nighthunt.”

“Hm,” He doesn’t comment on that but looks around pointedly at the three yao that Wei Wuxian had single-handedly subdued to protect his shidi before the rest of the Jiangs and Mingjue arrived.

The boy’s smile takes on a slightly strained appearance and his eyes flicker to the side briefly before he masters himself.

Ah.

He invites the boys for rest and food to his camp, running Huaisang’s words in his head. The next morning, he invites Wei Wuxian to spar with him, much to the astonishment of everyone present.

Nie Mingjue is a warrior at heart and he can sense a man’s character by crossing blades with him. He also wants to see those famed sword fighting skills for himself.

Most people would shake at the prospect of fighting Chifeng-zun, but Wei Wuxian approaches it with irrepressible glee. He unsheathes his sword and dares to attack first, aiming slightly off-center to slip under Baxia’s defence.

At first, Mingjue is taken aback by the arrogance and impatience. No seasoned disciple would attack such a superior opponent first, not unless they are asked to.

But Mingjue soon realizes that Wei Wuxian isn’t approaching the spar with the intention to *win* it, not really.

The Chifeng-zun disarms the boy within half a kè but Wei Wuxian just gracefully spins around Mingjue and summons his sword again, aiming a slash against his back with surprising agility.

Mingjue realizes just how close Wei Wuxian is when the boy’s robes brush against him as he leaps away from the strike.

“Impressive recovery,” He says with an approving nod, “And very decisive strikes.” There’s not even a hint of hesitation in the boy’s attacks. He presses forward like he knows Mingjue can handle it.

They engage in several short bouts, each ending with Wei Wuxian’s defeat but Mingjue is *thoroughly* impressed.

Because the boy is treating this like a learning opportunity. Every time Mingjue disarms him or forces him to the ground, Wei Wuxian springs back and alters his strikes minutely. It is astonishing to see the actual corrections made mid-battle. It doesn’t take long for Mingjue to start feeling the press of Wei Wuxian’s blade.

He laughs.

He laughs and unleashes, reveling in the chance to fight someone *so competent*. They're not matched in skill but the boy before him is a battle genius and he fights *smart*.

Mingjue remains undefeated when he has Wei Wuxian on the ground, panting and exhausted, but he can feel the burn of cuts all over his body. "Very impressive, Wei-gongzi."

The boy's grin is full of exhilarated satisfaction, "This one is happy to be of service, Chifeng-zun."

That title has never been said with so much respect.

Nie Mingjue offers Wei Wuxian a hand and pulls him up to his feet, passing him off to his concerned disciples. He briefly glances at the stern, scowling Jiang heir and dismisses them all.

When he returns to Qinghe, he seeks out Huaisang, "That boy is more Nie than Jiang."

"Oh?" Huaisang looks amused, "You met Wei-xiong, I take it." It is telling that his brother immediately guessed who he was talking about. "What do you want me to do about it?"

Mingjue thinks about days spent training such a worthy disciple. Thinks about Huaisang having a companion he clearly appreciates. He looks at his brother and wonders how much he would flourish under someone like Wei Wuxian.

"He's an orphan and hasn't been formally adopted into the Jiang Clan. The sect heir is insecure and growing resentful." Mingjue says, "Help me find a way to convince Jiang Fengmian that letting Wei Wuxian go will be in everyone's best interest."

Huaisang waves his fan rapidly, eyes bright with humor and anticipation, "Why da-ge, taking advantage of the Jiang Clan's weakness. How cruel."

Mingjue huffs, burying his embarrassment deep inside and walks away. He's certain Huaisang will work something out. He knows approaching Wei Wuxian directly is out of the question. The boy is too loyal.

Jin Guangshan

Jin Guangshan doesn't care much about Wei Wuxian. His wife complains about him often enough and is suspicious about his closeness to Jiang Yanli but Jin Guangshan doesn't care. A servant's son isn't valuable, no matter how skilled and powerful he is.

He doesn't care when his son grumbles about Wei Wuxian harassing Lan Wangji. He doesn't care when there are rumors about Lan Qiran *calling the boy back* of his own accord. The action is unprecedented, sure, but not anything alarming.

But then Wei Wuxian defeats the Xuanwu of Slaughter with Lan Wangji's assistance and catches *Wen Ruohan's* attention.

That's when he stops ignoring the boy. Wen Xu, Wen Ning, and Wei Wuxian seem to grow close, close enough that it takes them barely two years to swear brotherhood. In the intervening time, Wen Ruohan petitions Jiang Fengmian to release Wei Wuxian from his obligations. His trusted sources say that Wen Ruohan is so enamored, he wishes to *adopt* that insignificant boy.

To his further astonishment, Nie Mingjue takes an interest as well. According to his wife, the boy is mad enough to regularly visit Qinghe for *spars* of all things. Why would anyone willingly engage in battle with that temperamental man?

He doesn't understand the allure but he does understand the situation. The boy has managed to establish ties with powerful people from all the Great Sects. He is now an *invaluable tool*. Jin Guangshan doesn't value petty sentimental ties but he understands their worth for other people.

If he gains possession of Wei Wuxian, he can use his ties to gain influence over other sects, especially the younger generations.

So when the boy accompanies the Jiangs to renegotiate Jiang Yanli's betrothal with a-Xuan, Jin Guangshan makes sure every courtesy is paid to him. He ignores his wife's disapproval and engages the boy in conversations, hoping the honor of being acknowledged by the *Jin-zongzhu* himself would influence him.

Wei Wuxian is frustratingly confident and loyal. Many servants and disciples with such a background are ashamed of their lineage. Wei Wuxian wears it proudly, happy to be just the son of Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren. That explains why the foolish boy hasn't jumped on the offer to become Wen Ruohan's son.

When approaching and influencing the boy directly doesn't work, Jin Guangshan turns to Jiang Wanyin. Naturally, the Sect Heir is distressed by Wei Wuxian's increasing popularity. That makes him easy to influence. Jiang Fengmian has left such a vulnerable little spot in his armor undefended. The distance between father and son is apparent to anyone with eyes.

The words come easily, well-intentioned and logical. "It makes little sense for your father to deny Wen Ruohan," He says over tea, "After all, Wei Wuxian is an orphan and you can easily find a new Head Disciple. If your father cares for the boy so much, why doesn't he accept an offer that would elevate Wei Wuxian's position in society?"

It isn't an unreasonable question to ask. He knows why, of course. Jiang Fengmian recognizes Wei Wuxian's value as much as everyone else. He wants to keep that asset close. But Jiang Wanyin is no seasoned politician and easily falls into the trap.

The cracks start to appear the very next day. The space between the Head Disciple and Sect Heir is cold, full of stiff, offended silence.

"I find it interesting that your da-shixiong is courting so many powerful people." He says as they walk through the halls, heading for a garden banquet, "a-Xuan was telling me that he harassed the most powerful disciple during your Cloud Recesses days. I suppose he has

refined his technique now,” He says jokingly, a smirk on his lips, “He has great political acumen.”

That settles on Jiang Wanyin like a dark cloud.

Several such discreet conversations and pointed comments drive a wedge steadily between the two brightest masters of YunmengJiang.

On the final day, Jin Guangshan approaches Wei Wuxian again with compliments on his lips and a smile in his heart. He’s certain that the servant’s son is now distressed. There’s a furrow on his brow and his eyes no longer hold that bright, arrogant spark.

Good. It is better the boy knows his place. No matter how brilliant and powerful he is, his bloodline makes him inferior.

“Jin-zongzhu,” Wei Wuxian greets with a bow, “How may I help?”

Jin Guangshan nods in approval and invites him for a walk. They move in silence for some time before he speaks. “A man of your aptitude should keep his options open, Wei-gongzi. You may find a better path in unexpected places.”

Wei Wuxian says nothing for a while, only nodding amiably.

“Just consider this old man’s advice. There’s a lot to gain if you’re loyal and efficient.” Jin Guangshan smiles warmly, prepared to leave it at that. The seeds have already been sown and he knows there will be turmoil behind closed doors at the Lotus Pier.

“Loyalty,” Wei Wuxian muses with a quirk of his lips, “Has a way of overcoming disharmony. Love has a way of mending broken bridges.” Jin Guangshan narrows his eyes at the uncharacteristically formal manner of speaking, “Bonds cultivated for years can bear a brief storm. All children must eventually grow out of their weaknesses.”

Wei Wuxian bows, “Thank you for hosting us, Jin-zongzhu. Our visit has been memorable.”

Jin Guangshan looks beyond Wei Wuxian to see Jiang-xoing standing a small distance away, watching them. He hides a nervous twitch and nods elegantly at his fellow Sect Leader.

The man doesn’t nod back, just placing a hand on Wei Wuxian’s back and guiding him away.

He ponders over Wei Wuxian’s words as he walks back to his chambers. “All children must grow out of their weaknesses,” He repeats, tucking his hands behind his back. Was the boy talking about himself? His attachment to the Jiang Sect? His refusal to take up better offers?

Or was he talking about *Jiang Wanyin* ?

He shrugs and continues walking. Only time will tell.

Fengmian has always known there is something special about a-Xian. He has known from the moment he saw a child dressed in rags smile at him with honest kindness.

He knows a-Xian is everything the Jiangs are meant to be, the very embodiment of their Sect's principles and ethics.

It doesn't surprise him when those same principles and ethics clash violently with his wife and later, his son.

It doesn't surprise him when others notice A-Xian's potential and their family's dynamic.

'I'll take him in. He'll be my son in all but blood.' Wen Ruohan offers, after merely a week of knowing a-Xian. He passes the letter silently to his martial nephew and waits.

He seems surprised and troubled, "This is strange," Wei Changze's eyes glance at him, "Of course, I don't want to go but-" He scans the letter again and notices what Fengmian noticed as well.

Nowhere in the pages does Wen Ruohan mention the possibility of Wei Wuxian refusing him.

Wen Ruohan is a powerful man. He has the richest sect, the most powerful economy, the biggest collection of disciples, and insane amounts of personal power. The man is over fifty and he looks like he's in his early twenties.

He's also frustratingly unpredictable, as evidenced by his decision to adopt Wei Wuxian just a week after meeting him. Nothing about the man's decision makes sense to him. Perhaps Wen Ruohan can afford to and is disposed to act on his every whim, regardless of how unreasonable the whim is.

The offer is fair, Fengmian has to admit, and he can see a-Xian lingering on the third page.

Wei Wuxian's role in the household is clearly defined. He'll be Head Disciple under Wen Xu. Under Wen Ruohan, he is one of the Sect Heirs. It is clear that his children won't be allowed to inherit unless Wei Wuxian marries Wen Qing. If he doesn't, his branch of the family will still enjoy a high position of honor in the sect.

It is generous. It is *far* more generous than anything Fengmian has offered.

Fengmian has only been able to offer food, clothing, and shelter. Though a-Xian is his Head Disciple, his authority in the sect is uncertain. Sanniang's anger and a-Cheng's jealousy makes his position very tenuous.

Fengmian knows he's the only real protection Wei Wuxian has in the sect. If Jiang Fengmian dies, Sanniang could use her authority to toss Wei Wuxian out.

Worse, she could use her authority to beat him down and crush his spirit.

Another letter arrives a few months later, this one from the Nies.

Nie Mingjue is blunt, *'I saw some disconnect between your heir and Head Disciple. It's not uncommon for this to happen but you know as well as I that such things can weaken the Sect. I can take him in and you can trust me to not take advantage.'*

Fengmian wonders when it became the norm for other Sects to blatantly try to steal Head Disciples.

Of course, these exchanges can happen. Sometimes a disciple just isn't the right fit. The two Sects involved discuss together, agree to a few terms and conditions, sign contracts to keep Sect knowledge safe, and carry out the exchange.

But the case of Head Disciples is different.

Wei Wuxian takes one look at the letter, which again includes clearly defined roles and expectations, and slumps. Apparently, he has been receiving correspondence from Nie Huaisang that contain the most ludicrous bribes.

a-Xian laughs and dismisses the offers. He continues being a stellar Head Disciple but the popularity hasn't gone unnoticed.

Sanniang reacts with the fury of a storm. Zidian crackles and the air in the Lotus Pier bristles under her wrath.

"What is it about you?" She asks, once, her whip bared and ready to strike, *"Why does everyone want you?"*

Wei Wuxian isn't the one to cover, not now. He's no longer a ten-year-old boy with nowhere to go. He stands proud and doesn't engage. He doesn't even deflect with dismissals as he is want to do when his accomplishments overshadow a-Cheng's.

It makes Sanniang angrier and Jiang Fengmian intervenes before she can strike his nephew.

But the cracks have now deepened into fissures.

Yanli's engagement proves to be the last straw and Jiang Fengmian sees a different path for a-Xian.

a-Cheng is a good boy but he takes too much after his mother. He is easy to rile, easy to distract, easy to manipulate. Like his mother is jealous of Cangse Sanren, he is jealous of Wei Wuxian.

Fengmian should've known someone would take advantage of this weakness.

Jin Guangshan strikes at the right time and makes all of those fissures permanent.

The break is clean. It is deep.

It is unfixable.

a-Cheng delivers an ultimatum. He asks Wei Wuxian to *stop courting* powerful people, like a-Xian hadn't reached a hand out in honest friendship and nothing else.

a-Cheng demands loyalty and his version of it is warped. In his eyes, such deep associations with other Sects makes a-Xian unreliable.

He asks a-Xian to choose. He asks him to choose the Jiangs over all of his friends, over Wen Xu, over Wen Ning, Wen Qing, and Nie Huaisang. Over Nie Mingjue, who is fast becoming a respected mentor.

Over *Lan Wangji*.

a-Xian refuses.

When, a year later, Lan Wangji humbly presents himself at the Lotus Pier and asks to court a-Xian, Fengmian finally understands. He understands why the mention of Lan Wangji broke a-Xian's trust and affection. Of course, he agrees and grants his permission. He bears a-Cheng's betrayed glares and Sanniang's fury. He does the right thing and gives a-Xian away.

a-Xian is twenty one when he marries into the Lan Sect.

Fengmian sees how Lan Xichen smiles warmly and affectionately in welcome. He sees how Lan Qiren nods in gruff approval. He sees the boys bow to Qingheng-jun and get a small, but undeniably welcoming smile in return.

He watches the son of his heart embraced by his husband's family and is forced to be content.

The Winner

Lan Qiren's second invite to Cloud Recesses is accepted and the educator is happy to have a more mature but still irreverent Wei Wuxian back under his thumb. He does his best to mould the boy into a proper cultivator and is pleased to be assisted in the endeavor by Wangji.

Wen Ruohan, unfortunately, fails to acquire another son but settles for Wen Xu, Wen Ning, and Wei Wuxian declaring sworn brotherhood, much to the horror of the cultivation world. He delights in reports of chaos and terror the two cause when they go out on nighthunts together. He laughs when Wen Ning speaks of their mischief with an air of tired patience but never seems inclined to stop them. Wen Qing doesn't seem too keen on marrying Wei Wuxian, or any man, but she is happy to accept him as a brother in spirit. He decides to be content with that.

Nie Huaisang remains close friends with Wei Wuxian. Nie Mingjue delights in defeating an opponent so willing to learn from each battle and come back stronger. He invites Wei Wuxian

to the Unclean Realm often and Jiang Fengmian resigns himself to it eventually. The Nies try to steal Wei Wuxian more than once. Wei Wuxian eventually learns how to dodge the determined Chifeng-zun and draft polite letters in response to the most ludicrous bribes from Nie Huaisang.

He still visits the Unclean Realm for sparring regularly, much to *everyone's* horror.

Wei Wuxian proves to be too wily, slippery, and honorable for Jin Guangshan. No attempt to tempt the powerful little disciple away from the Jiang Sect proves successful. The boy happily accepts gifts with a cheeky smile, dismisses every compliment, and smoothly denies every invite until Jin Guangshan has to admit the investment is a failure. He doesn't care to spend more time or money on a lost cause.

Jiang-xiong eventually learns to guard his vulnerable spot and Jiang Wanyin remains outside his influence.

The entire venture is a failure.

--

Ultimately, there's only one person who manages to have the loyal and honorable Wei Wuxian in any meaningful way.

Surprisingly, it takes a heart offered willingly, without any demands or conditions attached. Wei Wuxian gives himself to Lan Wangji out of pure and honest love. It is a connection that forms based on matching characters and ideologies, complementary strengths and weaknesses, and the deepest, most ardent devotion to one another.

Lan Qiren grumbles but is satisfied. He now has a lifetime to bring out the boy's potential.

Lan Wangji just loves and inadvertently wins the Cultivation World's most coveted prize.

End Notes

I hope you guys enjoyed this one! Please comment to let me know! Shout at me on tumblr at vrischikawrites.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!